LUTHER'S WORKS

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Prefaces to the New Testament

Preface to the New Testament

1546 (1522)

[It would be right and proper for this book to go forth without any prefaces or extraneous names attached and simply have its own say under its own name. However many unfounded [wilde] interpretations and prefaces have scattered the thought of Christians to a point where no one any longer knows what is gospel or law, New Testament or Old. Necessity demands, therefore, that there should be a notice or preface, by which the ordinary man can be rescued from his former delusions, set on the right track, and taught what he is to look for in this book, so that he may not seek laws and commandments where he ought to be seeking the gospel and promises of God.

Therefore it should be known, in the first place, that the notion must be given up that there are four gospels and only four evangelists. The division of the New Testament books into legal, historical, prophetic, and wisdom books is also to be utterly rejected. Some make this division, thinking thereby (I know not how) to compare

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1 Prior to the 1534 edition of the complete Bible this preface—intended perhaps as a preface to the entire New Testament or at least to the first part of the New Testament including the gospels and Acts (see WA, DB 7, xxxi)—carried as a title the single word, "Preface." We have based our translation on the version which appeared in the 1546 edition of the complete Bible, noting significant variations from earlier versions, particularly from the first version as it appeared in the September Testament of 1522. WA, DB 6, 2-11. See pp. 227-232 for the general introduction to all of Luther's biblical prefaces.

2 On the ancient practice of providing prefaces, see the Introduction, p. 231. On the prefaces which appeared in early printed German Bibles, including the text of that to the book of Romans in the Mentel Bible—the first printed Bible in High German published by Johann Mentel in Strassburg about 1466—see Reu, "Luther's German Bible," pp. 35 and 305, n. 71.

3 Limiting the number of gospels to four was an ancient practice going back at least to Jerome, who based his position on the existence of but four living creatures in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4—the man, lion, ox, and eagle. Migne 30, 531-534. WA, DB 6, 536, n. 2, 12. Cf. p. 360, n. 9.

4 This division had been made, e.g., in the 1509 Vulgate printed at Basel, which Luther had probably used. WA, DB 6, 537, n. 2, 14.
the New with the Old Testament. On the contrary it is to be held firmly that.

Just as the Old Testament is a book in which are written God’s laws and commandments, together with the history of those who kept and of those who did not keep them, so the New Testament is a book in which are written the gospel and the promises of God, together with the history of those who believe and of those who do not believe them.

For “gospel” [Euangelium] is a Greek word and means in Greek a good message, good tidings, good news, a good report, which one sings and tells with gladness. For example, when David overcame the great Goliath, there came among the Jewish people the good report and encouraging news that their terrible enemy had been struck down and that they had been rescued and given joy and peace; and they sang and danced and were glad for it [I Sam. 18:6].

Thus this gospel of God or New Testament is a good story and report, sounded forth into all the world by the apostles, telling of a true David who strove with sin, death, and the devil, and overcame them, and thereby rescued all those who were captive in sin, afflicted with death, and overpowered by the devil. Without any merit of their own he made them righteous, gave them life, and saved them, so that they were given peace and brought back to God. For this they sing, and thank and praise God, and are glad forever, if only they believe firmly and remain steadfast in faith.

This report and encouraging tidings, or evangelical and divine news, is also called a New Testament. For it is a testament when a dying man bequeaths his property, after his death, to his legally defined heirs. And Christ, before his death, commanded and ordained that his gospel be preached after his death in all the world [Luke 24:44-47]. Thereby he gave to all who believe, as their possession, everything that he had. This included: his life, in which he swallowed up death; his righteousness, by which he blotted out sin; and his salvation, with which he overcame everlasting damnation. A poor man, dead in sin and consigned to hell, can hear nothing more comforting than this precious and tender message about Christ; from the bottom of his heart he must laugh and be glad over it, if he believes it true.

Now to strengthen this faith, God has promised this gospel and testament in many ways, by the prophets in the Old Testament, as St. Paul says in Romans 1:1, “I am set apart to preach the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David,” etc.

To mention some of these places: God gave the first promise when he said to the serpent, in Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Christ is this woman’s seed, who has bruised the devil’s head, that is, sin, death, hell, and all his power. For without this seed, no man can escape sin, death, or hell.

Again, in Genesis 22:18, God promised Abraham, “Through your descendant shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Christ is that descendant of Abraham, says St. Paul in Galatians 3:16; he has blessed all the world, through the gospel [Gal. 3:8]. For where Christ is not, there is still the curse that fell upon Adam and his children when he had sinned, so that they all are necessarily guilty and subject to sin, death, and hell. Over against this curse, the gospel now blesses all the world by publicly announcing, “Whoever believes in this descendant of Abraham shall be blessed.” That is, he shall be rid of sin, death, and hell, and shall remain righteous, alive, and saved forever, as Christ himself says in John 11:26, “Whoever believes in me shall never die.”

Again God made this promise to David in II Samuel 7:12-14 when he said, “I will raise up your son after you, who shall build

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5 The portions here set in brackets did not appear in any editions of the complete Bible, nor in editions of the New Testament after 1537. Divergences from the original 1522 text were due primarily to Luther’s desire to accommodate the text of the New Testament prefaces to that of the Old Testament prefaces with which they were—in the 1534 complete Bible—to appear for the first time, rather than to criticism on the part of Erasmus or other opponents. That these divergences were not taken into account in the 1534-1537 separate editions of the New Testament was probably due to the carelessness of the printer. Luther having likely given no personal attention to these particular editions. WA, DB 6, 536.

6 Cf. p. 236.

7 The editions prior to the 1534 complete Bible here add, “Thus one may be sure that there is only one gospel, just as there is only one book—the New Testament—one faith, and one God who gives the promise” (Eph. 4:4-5).
a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son,” etc. This is the kingdom of Christ, of which the gospel speaks: an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom of life, salvation, and righteousness, where all those who believe enter in from out of the prison of sin and death.

There are many more such promises of the gospel in the other prophets as well, for example Micah 5:2, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel”; and again, Hosea 13:14, “I shall ransom them from the power of hell and redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plague; O hell, I will be your destruction.”

The gospel, then, is nothing but the preaching about Christ, Son of God and of David, true God and man, who by his death and resurrection has overcome for us the sin, death, and hell of all men who believe in him. Thus the gospel can be either a brief or a lengthy message; one person can write of it briefly, another at length. He writes of it at length, who writes about many words and worles of Christ, as do the four evangelists. He writes of it briefly, however, who does not tell of Christ's works, but indicates briefly how by his death and resurrection he has overcome sin, death, and hell for those who believe in him, as do St. Peter and St. Paul.

See to it, therefore, that you do not make a Moses out of Christ, or a book of laws and doctrines out of the gospel, as has been done heretofore and as certain prefaces put it, even those of St. Jerome. For the gospel does not expressly demand works of our own by which we become righteous and are saved; indeed it condemns such works. Rather the gospel demands faith in Christ: that he has overcome for us sin, death, and hell, and thus gives us righteousness, life, and salvation not through our works, but through his own works, death, and suffering, in order that we may avail ourselves of his death and victory as though we had done it ourselves.

To be sure, Christ in the gospel, and St. Peter and St. Paul besides, do give many commandments and doctrines, and expound the law. But these are to be counted like all Christ's other works and good deeds. To know his works and the things that happened to him is not yet to know the true gospel, for you do not yet thereby know that he has overcome sin, death, and the devil. So, too, it is not yet knowledge of the gospel when you know these doctrines and commandments, but only when the voice comes that says, “Christ is your own, with his life, teaching, works, death, resurrection, and all that he is, has, does, and can do.”

Thus we see also that he does not compel us but invites us kindly and says, “Blessed are the poor,” etc. [Matt. 5:3]. And the apostles use the words, “I exhort,” “I entreat,” “I beg,” so that one sees on every hand that the gospel is not a book of law, but really a preaching of the benefits of Christ, shown to us and given to us for our own possession, if we believe. But Moses, in his books, drives, compels, threatens, strikes, and rebukes terribly, for he is a lawgiver and driver.

Hence it comes that to a believer no law is given by which he becomes righteous before God, as St. Paul says in I Timothy 1:9, because he is alive and righteous and saved by faith, and he needs nothing further except to prove his faith by works. Truly, if faith is there, he cannot hold back; he proves himself, breaks out into good works, confesses and teaches this gospel before the people, and stakes his life on it. Everything that he lives and does is directed to his neighbor's profit, in order to help him—not only to the attainment of this grace, but also in body, property, and honor. Seeing that Christ has done this for him, he thus follows Christ's example.

That is what Christ meant when at the last he gave no other commandment than love, by which men were to know who were his disciples [John 13:34-35] and true believers. For where works and love do not break forth, there faith is not right, the gospel does not yet take hold, and Christ is not rightly known. See, then, that you so approach the books of the New Testament as to learn to read them in this way.

[Which are the true and noblest books of the New Testament]10

[From all this you can now judge all the books and decide among them which are the best. John's Gospel and St. Paul's epis-

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10 Each of the four gospels had its own preface in Jerome's Vulgate. Luther's concern for the "one gospel" kept him from ever writing four such separate prefaces. Indeed at the beginning it seems likely that he envisioned but one preface for the entire New Testament. WA, DB 6, 537, n. 8, 5; WA, DB 7, xxi. Cf. pp. 117-124.
WORD AND SACRAMENT

Preface to the Acts of the Apostles

1546 (1533)

Contrary to what has sometimes been the practice, this book should not be read or regarded as though St. Luke had written about the personal work or history of the apostles simply as an example of good works or good life. Even St. Augustine and many others have looked upon the fact that the apostles had all things in common with Christians [Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37] as the best example which the book contains. Yet this practice did not last long and in time had to stop. Rather it should be noted that by this book St. Luke teaches the whole of Christendom, even to the end of the world, that the true and chief article of Christian doctrine is this: We must all be justified alone by faith in Jesus Christ, without any contribution from the law or help from our works.

This doctrine is the chief intention of the book and the author's principal reason for writing it. Therefore he emphasizes so powerfully not only the preaching of the apostles about faith in Christ, but both Gentiles and Jews must thereby be justified without any merits or works, but also the examples and the instances of this teaching, how the Gentiles as well as Jews were justified through the gospel alone, without the law.

As St. Peter testifies in chapters 10:34-47 and 15:7-11, in this matter God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles; just as he gave the Holy Spirit through the gospel to the Gentiles who were living without the law, so he gave him to the Jews through the gospel, and not through the law or because of their own works.

11 On the term "straw" cf. Luther's reference on p. 395 to I Cor. 3:12. Luther's sharp expression may have been in part a reaction against Karlstadt's excessive praise of the book of James. Cf. WA, DB 6, 537, n. 10, 6-34, and the literature there listed.
12 See especially the Preface to James in this volume, pp. 395-398. Cf. also Luther's negative estimate of the book of James already in his 1530 Babylonian Captivity of the Church in LW 30, 118, and in his Resolutions of 1519 in WA 2, 425.
and merits. Thus in this book St. Luke puts side by side both the doctrine about faith and the examples of faith.

Therefore this book might well be called a commentary on the epistles of St. Paul. For what Paul teaches and insists upon with words and passages of Scripture, St. Luke here points out and proves with examples and instances to show that it has happened and must happen in the way St. Paul teaches, namely, that no law, no work justifies men, but only faith in Christ. Here, then, in this book you find a beautiful mirror in which you can see that this is true: \[\text{Sola fides justificat,} \] “faith alone justifies.” For all the examples and incidents contained in this book are sure and comforting testimonies to this doctrine; they neither deceive nor lie to you.

For consider how St. Paul himself was converted [Acts 9:1-19], and how the Gentile, Cornelius, was converted through St. Peter’s word—the angel telling him beforehand that Peter would preach to him and that thereby he would be saved [Acts 10:1-8, 30-33]. Look at the proconsul Sergius [Acts 13:7] and at Paul and Barnabas preached. Look at the first council of the apostles at Jerusalem, in chapter 15; look at all the preaching of SS. Peter, Paul, Stephen, and Philip. You will find that it all adds up to one thing: we must come into grace and be justified only through faith in Christ, without law and works.

By means of this book, used in this way, we can silence in a masterly and effective way the loquacity of opponents who [keep on] pointing us to the law and to our own works, and reveal their foolish unwisdom before all the world. Therefore St. Luke says too that these illustrations of faith amazed the pious Jews who had become believers, and that the unbelieving Jews became maddened and foolish over it. And this was no surprise, for they had been raised in the law and had been accustomed to it ever since Abraham. So it was bound to vex them that the Gentiles, who were without law and God, should be equal to themselves in God’s grace.

But that our people [today]—we being all Gentiles—should slander and persecute this doctrine is ten times worse. For here we see, and cannot deny, that the grace of God and the knowledge of Christ came to our forebears without law and merit, indeed, [when they themselves lived] in horrible idolatry and blasphemy. But [the papists] will gain no more by their slander and persecution than the Jews gained by their raging and raving. For he who of old threatened the Jews and had Moses intone, “I will provoke you with those who are not my people, and make you mad with an ignorant nation” [Deut. 32:21]; and who said in Hosea 2:[13], “I will call ‘my people’ those are not my people” (that is, ‘who live without law and works), and then did what he said, even this very One threatens these slanderers of ours with the same warnings. And he will surely keep his word, as he has already begun to do. But [the papists] will not believe this until, like the Jews, they experience it. Amen.

Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans\[15\]

1546 (1522)

This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.

Therefore I too will do my best, so far as God has given me power, to open the way into it through this preface, so that it may

\[\text{Cf. pp. 185-189, 195-202.}\]
be the better understood by everyone. Heretofore it has been badly obscured by glosses and all kinds of idle talk, though in itself it is a bright light, almost sufficient to illuminate the entire holy Scriptures.

To begin with we must have knowledge of its language and know what St. Paul means by the words: "law," "sin," "grace," "faith," "righteousness," "flesh," "spirit," and the like. Otherwise no reading of the book has any value.

The little word "law" you must here not take in human fashion as a teaching about what works are to be done or not done. That is the way with human laws; a law is fulfilled by works, even though there is no heart in the doing of them. But God judges according to what is in the depths of the heart. For this reason, his law too makes its demands on the inmost heart; it cannot be satisfied with works, but rather punishes as hypocrisy and lies the works not done from the bottom of the heart. Hence all men are called liars in Psalm 110[:11], because no one keeps or can keep God's law from the bottom of the heart. For everyone finds in himself displeasure in what is good and pleasure in what is bad.

If, now, there is no willing pleasure in the good, then the inmost heart is not set on the law of God. Then, too, there is surely sin, and God's wrath is deserved, even though outwardly there seem to be many good deeds and an honorable life.

Hence St. Paul concludes, in chapter 2[:13], that the Jews are all sinners, saying that only the doers of the law are righteous before God. He means by this that no one, in terms of his works, is a doer of the law. Rather, he speaks to them thus, "You teach one must not commit adultery, but you yourself commit adultery" [2:22]; and again, "In passing judgment upon another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things" [2:1]. This is as if to say, "You live a fine outward life in the works of the law, and you pass judgment on those who do not so live. You know how to teach everyone; you see the speck that is in the eye of another, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye" [Matt. 7:5].

For even though you keep the law outwardly, with works, from fear of punishment or love of reward, nevertheless you do all this unwillingly, without pleasure in and love for the law, but with reluctance and under compulsion. For if the law were not there, you would prefer to act otherwise. The conclusion is that from the bottom of your heart you hate the law. What point is there then in your teaching others not to steal, if you yourself are a thief at heart, and would gladly be one outwardly if you dared? Though, to be sure, the outward work does not lag far behind among such hypocrites! So you teach others, but not yourself; nor do you yourself know what you are teaching—you have never yet understood the law correctly. Moreover the law increases sin, as St. Paul says in chapter 5[:20], because the more the law demands of men what they cannot do, the more they hate the law.

For this reason he says, in chapter 7[:14], "The law is spiritual." What does that mean? If the law were for the body, it could be satisfied with works; but since it is spiritual, no one can satisfy it unless all that you do is done from the bottom of your heart. But such a heart is given only by God's Spirit, who fashions a man after the law, so that he acquires a desire for the law in his heart, doing nothing henceforth out of fear and compulsion but out of a willing heart. The law is thus spiritual in that it will be loved and fulfilled with such a spiritual heart, and requires such a spirit. Where that spirit is not in the heart, there sin remains, also displeasure with the law and hostility toward it even though the law itself is good and just and holy.

Accustom yourself, then, to this language, that doing the works of the law and fulfilling the law are two very different things. The work of the law is everything that one does, or can do, toward keeping the law of his own free will or by his own powers. But since in the midst of all these works and along with them there remains in the heart a dislike of the law and compulsion with respect to it, these works are all wasted and have no value. That is what St. Paul means in chapter 3[:20], when he says, "By works of the law will no man be justified in God's sight." Hence you see that the wranglers and sophists practice deception when they teach men to pre-

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16 For an alphabetical listing of commentaries on Romans, including a considerable number from periods prior to the Reformation, see William P. Dickinson (trans.), H. A. W. Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), pp. xv-xiii.

17 Vulgate version, Ps. 115:11; cf. KJV.
WORD AND SACRAMENT

pare themselves for grace by means of works. How can a man prepare himself for good by means of works, if he does good works only with aversion and unwillingness in his heart? How shall a work please God if it proceeds from a reluctant and resisting heart?

To fulfill the law, however, is to do its works with pleasure and love, to live a godly and good life of one's own accord, without the compulsion of the law. This pleasure and love for the law is put into the heart by the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in chapter 5:5. But the Holy Spirit is not given except in, with, and by faith in Jesus Christ, as St. Paul says in the introduction. Faith, moreover, comes only through God's Word or gospel, which preaches Christ, saying that he is God's Son and a man, and has died and risen again for our sakes, as he says in chapters 3:25, 4:25, and 10:9.

So it happens that faith alone makes a person righteous and fulfills the law. For out of the merit of Christ it brings forth the Spirit. And the Spirit makes the heart glad and free, as the law requires that

18 Two elements dominate the scholastic conception of grace: infusion and merit. By grace, Thomas (1225-1274) meant not God's love, favor, or forgiveness but "a certain supernatural thing in man, coming into existence from God"—an infused condition, a supernatural ethical nature which makes man capable of doing good. Man's free will is thereby moved to prepare itself for or dispose itself toward further grace. Thomas always referred grace, and with it everything good in man, back to the agency of God as Prime Mover. Despite his emphasis on divine causality, however, his conception of grace as an infused substantial gift required—in order that the personal element not be lost entirely—that the personal agency of man and his free will be constantly brought to the fore. Thus Bonaventura taught that the purpose of God's infusing of grace is to make the sinner capable of merit; this merit can be attained, however, only through the free will.

The scholastics distinguished between two kinds of merit: the merit of worthiness (meritum de condigna—conduct insofar as it is purely a product of grace, and is deserving of eternal life) and the merit of fitness (meritum de congruo—conduct insofar as it results from the exercise of the free will, and merits from God a reward commensurate with its particular excellence). In the process of salvation God bestows initially a "grace gratuitously given." The resultant movements of the human will merit (congruously, by fitness) through co-operation God's next gift of the "grace which makes acceptable." Again, the resultant movements of the human will demand (condignly, by worthiness) through co-operation the gift of eternal life.

Without grace, of course, no merit is possible. To the attainment of justification, however, man can nevertheless dispose or prepare himself by fitness. Thus Gabriel Biel (ca. 1425-1492) says, "Good works morally performed without love merit by fitness ... the grace of justification." So the idea of merit was made tolerable by the pious interpretation given to it in the appeal to prior grace, while into the conception of infused grace there was introduced through the scheme of merits that element which it otherwise lacked, namely, an element of personal relationship to God. Cf. Seeberg, History of Doctrines, II, 118-123.

368

PREFACES TO NEW TESTAMENT

it shall be. Thus good works emerge from faith itself. That is what St. Paul means in chapter 3:[31]; after he has rejected the works of the law, it sounds as if he would overthrow the law by this faith. "No," he says, "we uphold the law by faith"; that is, we fulfill it by faith.

Sin, in the Scripture, means not only the outward works of the body but also all the activities that move men to do these works, namely, the inmost heart, with all its powers. Thus the little word "do" ought to mean that a man falls all the way and lives in sin. Even outward works of sin do not take place, unless a man plunges into it completely with body and soul. And the Scriptures look especially into the heart and single out the root and source of all sin, which is unbelief in the inmost heart. As, therefore, faith alone makes a person righteous, and brings the Spirit and pleasure in good outward works, so unbelief alone commits sin, and brings forth the flesh and pleasure in bad outward works, as happened to Adam and Eve in paradise, Genesis 3.

Hence Christ calls unbelief the only sin, when he says in John 16:[8-9], "The Spirit will convince the world of sin ... because they do not believe in me." For this reason too, before good or bad works take place, as the good or bad fruits, there must first be in the heart faith or unbelief. Unbelief is the root, the sap, and the chief power of all sin. For this reason, in the Scriptures it is called the serpent's head and the head of the old dragon, which the seed of the woman, Christ, must tread under foot, as was promised to Adam, Genesis 3:[15].

Between grace and gift there is this difference. Grace actually means God's favor, or the good will which in himself he bears toward us, by which he is disposed to give us Christ and to pour into us the Holy Spirit with his gifts. This is clear from chapter 5:[15], where St. Paul speaks of "the grace and gift in Christ," etc. The gifts and the Spirit increase in us every day, but they are not yet perfect since there remain in us the evil desires and sins that war against the Spirit, as he says in Romans 7:[5ff.] and Galatians 5:[17], and the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, as foretold in Genesis 3:[15]. Nevertheless grace

18 Thun, i.e., "commit sin."
does so much that we are accounted completely righteous before God. For his grace is not divided or parcelled out, as are the gifts, but takes us completely into favor for the sake of Christ our Intercessor and Mediator. And because of this, the gifts are begun in us.

In this sense, then, you can understand chapter 7. There St. Paul still calls himself a sinner; and yet he can say, in chapter 8[:1], that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, simply because of the incompleteness of the gifts and of the Spirit. Because the flesh is not yet slain, we are still sinners. But because we believe in Christ and have a beginning of the Spirit, God is so favorable and gracious to us that he will not count the sin against us or judge us because of it. Rather he deals with us according to our faith in Christ, until sin is slain.

Faith is not the human notion and dream that some people call faith. When they see that no improvement of life and no good works follow—although they can hear and say much about faith—they fall into the error of saying, “Faith is not enough; one must do works in order to be righteous and be saved.” This is due to the fact that when they hear the gospel, they get busy and by their own powers create an idea in their heart which says, “I believe”; they take this then to be a true faith. But, as it is a human figment and idea that never reaches the depths of the heart, nothing comes of it either, and no improvement follows.

Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1[:12-13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times.

This knowledge of and confidence in God’s grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown him this grace. Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire. Beware, therefore, of your own false notions and of the idle talkers who imagine themselves wise enough to make decisions about faith and good works, and yet are the greatest fools. Pray God that he may work faith in you. Otherwise you will surely remain forever without faith, regardless of what you may think or do.

Righteousness, then, is such a faith. It is called “the righteousness of God” because God gives it, and counts it as righteousness for the sake of Christ our Mediator, and makes a man to fulfil his obligation to everybody. For through faith a man becomes free from sin and comes to take pleasure in God’s commandments, whereby he gives God the honor due him, and pays him what he owes him. Likewise he serves his fellow-men willingly, by whatever means he can, and thus pays his debt to everyone. Nature, free will, and our own powers cannot bring this righteousness into being. For as no one can give himself faith, neither can he take away his own unbelief. How, then, will he take away a single sin, even the very smallest? Therefore all that is done apart from faith, or in unbelief, is false; it is hypocrisy and sin, Romans 14[:23], no matter how good a showing it makes.

Flesh and spirit you must not understand as though flesh is only that which has to do with unchastity and spirit is only that which has to do with what is inwardly in the heart. Rather, like Christ in John 3[:6], Paul calls everything “flesh” that is born of the flesh—the whole man, with body and soul, mind and senses—because everything about him longs for the flesh. Thus you should learn to call him “fleshly” too who thinks, teaches, and talks a great
deal about lofty spiritual matters, yet does so without grace. From the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21, you can learn that Paul calls heresy and hatred "works of the flesh." And in Romans 8:3 he says that "the law is weakened by the flesh"; yet this is said not of unchastity, but of all sins, and above all of unbelief, which is the most spiritual of all vices.

On the contrary, you should call him "spiritual" who is occupied with the most external kind of works, as Christ was when he washed the disciples' feet [John 13:1-14], and Peter when he steered his boat and fished. Thus "the flesh" is a man who lives and works, inwardly and outwardly, in the service of the flesh's gain and of this temporal life. "The spirit" is the man who lives and works, inwardly and outwardly, in the service of the Spirit and of the future life.

Without such a grasp of these words, you will never understand this letter of St. Paul, nor any other book of Holy Scripture. Therefore beware of all teachers who use these words in a different sense, no matter who they are, even Origen, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and others like them or even above them. And now we will take up the epistle.

It is right for a preacher of the gospel in the first place by revelation of the law and of sin to rebuke and to constitute as sin everything that is not the living fruit of the Spirit and of faith in Christ, in order that men should be led to know themselves and their own wretchedness, and to become humble and ask for help. This is therefore what St. Paul does. He begins in chapter 1 to rebuke the gross sins and unbelief that are plainly evident. These were, and still are, the sins of the heathen who live without God's grace. He says: Through the gospel there shall be revealed the wrath of God from heaven against all men because of their godless lives and their unrighteousness. For even though they know and daily recognize that there is a God, nevertheless nature itself, without grace, is so bad that it neither thanks nor honors God. Instead it blinds itself, and goes steadily from bad to worse until, after idolatry, it blatantly commits the most shameful sins, along with all vices, and also allows others to commit them unrepentantly.

In chapter 2 he extends his rebuke to include those who seem outwardly to be righteous and who commit their sins in secret. Such were the Jews and such are all the hypocrites who without desire or love for the law of God lead decent lives, but at heart hate God's law, and yet are quick to judge other people. This is the nature of all hypocrites, to think of themselves as pure, and yet to be full of covetousness, hatred, pride, and all uncleanness, Matthew 23:25-28. These are they who despise God's goodness, and in their hardheartedness heap wrath upon themselves. Thus St. Paul, as a true interpreter of the law, leaves no one without sin, but proclaims the wrath of God upon all who would live well simply by nature or of their own volition. He makes them to be no better than the obvious sinners; indeed, he says they are stubborn and unrepentant.

In chapter 3 he throws them all together in a heap, and says that one is like the other: they are all sinners before God. Only, the Jews have had the word of God. Though not many have believed that word, this does not mean that the faith and truth of God are exhausted. He quotes incidentally a verse from Psalm 51:4, that God remains justified in his words. Afterward he comes back to this again and proves also by Scripture that all men are sinners, and that by the works of the law nobody is justified, but that the law was given only that sin might be known.

Then he begins to teach the right way by which men must be justified and saved. He says: They are all sinners making no boast of God; but they must be justified without merit [of their own] through faith in Christ, who has merited this for us by his blood, and has become for us a mercy-seat by God. God forgives all former sins to demonstrate that we are helped only by his righteousness, which he grants in faith, and which was revealed at that time through the gospel and was witnessed to beforehand by the law and the prophets. Thus the law is upheld by faith, though the works of the law are thereby put down, together with the boasting of them.

After the first three chapters, in which sin is revealed and faith's way to righteousness is taught, St. Paul begins in chapter 4 to meet certain remonstrances and objections. First he takes up the one that all men commonly make when they hear that faith justifies without works. They say, "Are we, then, to do no good works?" Therefore he himself takes up the case of Abraham, and asks, "What did Abraham accomplish, then, with his good works? 21

21 Aus natur oder freien willen.
WORD AND SACRAMENT

Were they all in vain? Were his works of no use?" He concludes that Abraham was justified by faith alone, without any works, so much so that the Scriptures in Genesis 15:6 declare that he was justified by faith alone even before the work of circumcision. But if the work of circumcision contributed nothing to his righteousness, though God had commanded it and it was a good work of obedience, then surely no other good work will contribute anything to righteousness. Rather, as Abraham's circumcision was an external sign by which he showed the righteousness that was already his in faith, so all good works are only external signs which follow out of faith; like good fruit, they demonstrate that a person is already inwardly righteous before God.

With this powerful illustration from the Scriptures, St. Paul confirms the doctrine of faith which he had set forth in chapter 3. He cites also another witness, David, who says in Psalm 32:1-2 that a man is justified without works—although he does not remain without works when he has been justified. Then he gives the illustration a broader application, setting it over against all other works of the law. He concludes that the Jews cannot be Abraham's heirs merely because of their blood, still less because of the works of the law; they must inherit Abraham's faith, if they would be true heirs. For before the law—before the law of Moses and the law of circumcision—Abraham was justified by faith and called the father of all believers. Moreover the law brings about wrath rather than grace, because no one keeps the law out of love for it and pleasure in it. What comes by the works of the law is thus disfavor rather than grace. Therefore faith alone must obtain the grace promised to Abraham, for these examples too were written for our sakes [Rom. 15:4], that we too should believe.

In chapter 5 he comes to the fruits and works of faith, such as peace, joy, love to God and to every man, as well as confidence, assurance, boldness, courage, and hope amid tribulation and suffering. For all this follows, if faith be true, because of the superabundant goodness that God shows us in Christ, causing Christ to die for us before we could ask it of him, indeed, while we were still enemies. Thus we have it that faith justifies without any works; and yet it does not follow that men are therefore to do no good works, but rather that the genuine works will not be lacking. Of these the work-righteous saints know nothing. They dream up works of their own in which there is no peace, joy, confidence, love, hope, boldness, or any of the qualities of true Christian work and faith.

After this he digresses and makes a pleasant excursion, telling whence come sin and righteousness, death and life, and comparing Adam and Christ. He means to say that Christ had to come as a second Adam bequeathing his righteousness to us through a new spiritual birth in faith, just as the first Adam bequeathed sin to us through the old fleshly birth. Thus he declares and proves that no one by his own works can raise himself out of sin into righteousness, any more than he can prevent the birth of his own body. This is proved also by the fact that the divine law—which ought to assist toward righteousness, if anything can—has not only not helped, but has even increased sin. For the more the law forbids, the more our evil nature hates the law, and the more it wants to give reign to its own lust. Thus the law makes Christ all the more necessary, and more grace is needed to help our nature.

In chapter 6 he takes up the special work of faith, the conflict of the spirit with the flesh for the complete slaying of the sin and lust that remain after we are justified. He teaches us that we are not by faith so freed from sin that we can be idle, slack, and careless, as though there were no longer any sin in us. Sin is present; but it is no longer reckoned for our condemnation, because of the faith that is struggling against it. Therefore we have enough to do all our life long in taming the body, slaying its lusts, and compelling its members to obey the spirit and not the lusts. Thus we become like the death and resurrection of Christ, and complete our baptism—which signifies the death of sin and the new life of grace—until we are entirely purified of sin, and even our bodies rise again with Christ and live forever.

All this we can do, he says, because we are under grace and not under law. He himself explains what this means. To be without the law is not the same thing as to have no laws and to be able to do what one pleases. Rather we are under the law when, without grace, we occupy ourselves with the works of the law. Then sin certainly rules [us] through the law, for no one loves the law by nature; and that is great sin. Grace, however, makes the law dear

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Editions prior to 1546 read "in" rather than "under." WA, DB 7, 19, n. 29/30.
to us; then sin is no longer present, and the law is no longer against us but one with us.

This is the true freedom from sin and from the law. He writes about this down to the end of the chapter, saying that it is a freedom only to do good with pleasure and to live well without the compulsion of the law. Therefore this freedom is a spiritual freedom, which does not overthrow the law but presents what the law demands, namely, pleasure [in the law] and love [for it] whereby the law is quieted and no longer drives men or makes demands of them. It is just as if you owed a debt to your overlord and could not pay it. There are two ways in which you could rid yourself of the debt: either he would take nothing from you and would tear up the account, or some good man would pay it for you and give you the means to satisfy the account. It is in this latter way that Christ has made us free from the law. Our freedom is, therefore, no carefree fleshly freedom which is not obligated to do anything, but a freedom that does many works of all kinds, and is free of the demands and obligations of the law.

In chapter 7 he supports this with an analogy from married life. When a man dies, his wife is also alone, and thus the one is released entirely from the other. Not that the wife cannot or ought not take another husband, but rather that she is now for the first time really free to take another—something which she could not do previously, before she was free from her husband. So our conscience is bound to the law, under the old man of sin; when he is slain by the Spirit, then the conscience is free, and the one is released from the other. Not that the conscience is to do nothing, but rather that it is now for the first time really free to hold fast to Christ, the second husband, and bring forth the fruit of life.

Then he depicts more fully the nature of sin and of the law, how by means of the law sin now stirs and becomes mighty. The old man comes to hate the law all the more because he cannot pay what the law demands. Sin is his nature and of himself he can do nothing but sin; therefore the law to him is death and torment. Not that the law is bad, but the old man's evil nature cannot endure the good, and the law demands good of him; just as a sick man cannot stand it when he is required to run and jump and do the works of a well man.
that these three chapters (6-8) drive home the one task of faith, which is to slay the old Adam and subdue the flesh.

In chapters 9, 10, and 11 he teaches of God's eternal predestination—out of which originally proceeds who shall believe or not, who can or cannot get rid of sin—in order that our salvation may be taken entirely out of our hands and put in the hand of God alone. And this too is utterly necessary. For we are so weak and uncertain that if it depended on us, not even a single person would be saved; the devil would surely overpower us all. But since God is dependable—his predestination cannot fail, and no one can withstand him—we still have hope in the face of sin.

Here, now, for once we must put a stop to those wicked and high-flying spirits who first apply their own reason to this matter. They begin at the top to search the abyss of divine predestination, and worry in vain about whether they are predestinated. They are bound to plunge to their own destruction, either through despair, or through throwing caution to the winds.

But you had better follow the order of this epistle. Worry first about Christ and the gospel, that you may recognize your sin and his grace. Then fight your sin, as the first eight chapters here have taught. Then, when you have reached the eighth chapter, and are under the cross and suffering, this will teach you correctly of predestination in chapters 9, 10, and 11, and how comforting it is. For in the absence of suffering and the cross and the perils of death, one cannot deal with predestination without harm and without secret anger against God. The old Adam must first die before he can tolerate this thing and drink the strong wine. Therefore beware that you do not drink wine while you are still a suckling. There is a limit, a time, and an age for every doctrine.

In chapter 12 he teaches what true worship is, and makes all Christians priests. They are to offer not money or cattle, as under the law, but their own bodies, with slaying of the lusts. Then he describes the outward conduct of Christians, under the spiritual government, telling how they are to teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live, and act toward friend, foe, and all men. These are the works that a Christian does; for, as has been said, faith takes no holidays.

24 Sich in die freie schantz schlafen.

In chapter 13 he teaches honor and obedience to worldly government. Although worldly government does not make people righteous before God, nevertheless it is instituted in order to accomplish at least this much, that the good may have outward peace and protection and the bad may not be free to do evil in peace and quietness, and without fear. Therefore the good too are to honor it even though they themselves do not need it. Finally, he comprehends it all in love, and sums it up in the example of Christ: as he has done for us, we are also to do, following in his footsteps.

In chapter 14 he teaches that consciences weak in faith are to be led gently, spared, so that we do not use our Christian freedom for doing harm, but for the assistance of the weak. For where that is not done, the result is discord and contempt for the gospel; and the gospel is the all-important thing. Thus it is better to yield a little to the weak in faith, until they grow stronger, than to have the teaching of the gospel come to nothing. And this work is a peculiar work of love, for which there is great need even now, when with the eating of meat and other liberties, men are rudely and roughly—and needlessly—shaking weak consciences, before they know the truth.

In chapter 15 he sets up Christ as an example: we are to tolerate also those other weak ones who fail in other ways, in open sins or in unpleasing habits. We are not to cast them off, but to bear with them until they too grow better. For so Christ has done with us, and still does every day; he bears with our many faults and bad habits, and with all our imperfections, and helps us constantly.

Then, at the end, he prays for them, praises them, and commends them to God. He speaks of his own office and of his preaching, and asks them kindly for a contribution to the poor at Jerusalem. All that he speaks of or deals with is pure love.

The last chapter is a chapter of greetings. But he mingles with them a noble warning against the doctrines of men, which break in alongside the teaching of the gospel and cause offense. It is as if he had certainly foreseen that out of Rome and through the Romans would come the seductive and offensive canons and decrees, and the whole squirming mass of human laws and commandments.

25 Cf. Luther's treatise Avoiding the Doctrines of Men (1522) in this volume, pp. 125-153.
which have now drowned the whole world and wiped out this epistle and all the Holy Scriptures, along with the Spirit and faith itself, so that nothing remains anymore except the idol, Beli,


In this epistle we thus find most abundantly the things that a Christian ought to know, namely, what is law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross; and also how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, be he righteous or sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe—and even toward our own selves. Moreover this is all ably supported with Scripture and proved by St. Paul's own example and that of the prophets, so that one could not wish for anything more. Therefore it appears that he wanted in this one epistle to sum up briefly the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine, and to prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament. For, without doubt, whoever has this epistle well in his heart, has with him the light and power of the Old Testament. Therefore let every Christian be familiar with it and exercise himself in it continually. To this end may God give his grace. Amen.

Preface to the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians

1546 (1530)

In this epistle St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be one in faith and love, and to see to it that they learn well the chief thing, namely, that Christ is our salvation, the thing over which all reason and wisdom stumbles.

For it was as in our day, when the gospel has come to light. There are many mad saints (we call them factious spirits, fanatics, and heretics) who have become wise and learned all too quickly and, because of their great knowledge and wisdom, cannot live in harmony with anybody. One wants to go this way, another that way, as though it would be a great shame if each were not to undertake something special and to put forth his own wisdom. No one can make them out to be fools—though at bottom they neither know nor understand anything about that which is really the chief thing, even though they jabber much about it with their mouths. So it was with St. Paul too. He had taught his Corinthians Christian faith and freedom from the law. But then the mad saints came along, and the immature know-it-alls. They broke up the unity of the doctrine and caused division among the believers. One claimed to belong to Paul, the other to Apollos; one to Peter, the other to Christ. One wanted circumcision, the other not; one wanted marriage, the other not; one wanted to eat food offered to idols, the other not. Some wanted to be outwardly free [leiblich frey]; some of the women wanted to go with uncovered hair, and so on. They went so far that one man abused his liberty and married his father's wife, some did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and some thought lightly of the sacrament. In short, things got so wild and disorderly that everyone wanted to be the expert and do the teaching and make what he pleased of the gospel, the sacrament, and faith. Meanwhile they let the main thing drop—namely, that Christ is our salvation, righteousness, and redemption—as if they had long since outgrown it. This truth can never remain intact when people begin to imagine they are wise and know it all.

This is exactly what is now happening to us. Now that we, by God's grace, have opened the gospel to the Germans, everyone claims that he is the top expert and alone has the Holy Spirit—as if the gospel had been preached in order that in it we should show off our cleverness and reason, and strive for a reputation. Those Corinthians may well be an example or illustration of our people in these days, who also certainly need an epistle of this kind. But this is the way things have to go with the gospel; mad saints and immature know-it-alls have to create disturbances and offenses, so that those who are "tested," as St. Paul also says here [1 Cor. 3:13], may be revealed.

Therefore St. Paul most severely rebukes and condemns this
shameful wisdom, and makes these connoisseur saints out to be fools. He says outright that they know nothing of Christ, or of the Spirit and gifts of God given to us in Christ, and that they had better begin to learn. It takes spiritual folk to understand this. The desire to be wise and the pretense of cleverness in the gospel are the very things that really give offense and hinder the knowledge of Christ and God, and create disturbances and contentions. This clever wisdom and reason can well serve to make for nothing but mad saints and wild Christians. Yet such people can never know our Lord Christ, unless they first become fools again and humbly let themselves be taught and led by the simple word of God. This is what St. Paul deals with in the first four chapters.

In chapter 5 he rebukes the gross unchastity of the man who had married his father’s wife. He would put this man under the ban and give him over to the devil. Thus he points out the right way of using the ban, that it should be laid with the consent of the believing congregation upon obvious transgressions, as Christ also teaches in Matthew 18[:17].

In chapter 6 he rebukes contention and disputing in the courts, especially before heathen and unbelievers. He teaches them that they should settle their cases among themselves, or suffer wrong.

In chapter 7 he gives instruction concerning chastity and married life. He praises chastity and virginity, saying that these are helpful in allowing closer attentiveness to the gospel, as Christ also teaches in Matthew 19[:12] concerning celibates who are chaste for the sake of the gospel or the kingdom of heaven. But Paul wills that it be practiced without force or compulsion, or the risk of greater sin; otherwise, marriage is better than a chastity which is continually aflame with passion.

In chapters 8 to 12 he discusses many different ways in which weak consciences are to be guided and regarded in external matters such as eating, drinking, apparel, and receiving the sacrament. Everywhere he forbids the strong to despise the weak, since he himself, even though he is an apostle, has refrained from many things to which he really had a right. Moreover the strong may well be afraid, because in ancient Israel so many were destroyed, all of whom had been led out of Egypt by miracles. Besides this, he makes several digressions into worthwhile teachings.

In chapters 12 and 13 he discusses the many different gifts of God, among which love is the best. He teaches the people not to exalt themselves but to serve one another in unity of spirit, since there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and everything is one, however great the diversity.

In chapter 14 he teaches the preachers, prophets, and singers to use their gifts in an orderly manner; they are to display their preaching, skill, and understanding for edification only, and not in order to gain honor for themselves.

In chapter 15 he takes those to task who had taught and believed wrongly concerning the resurrection of the body.

In the last chapter he exhorts the people to give brotherly assistance to the needy in the form of material aid.

Preface to the Second Epistle to the Corinthians

1546 (1522)

In the first epistle, St. Paul rebuked the Corinthians severely for many things, pouring sharp wine into their wounds [Luke 10:34] and frightening them. But an apostle should be a preacher of comfort, to raise up terrified and fearful consciences, rather than to frighten them. Therefore in this epistle he praises them once more and pours oil into their wounds [Luke 10:34]. He shows himself wonderfully kind to them and bids them to receive the sinner back with love.

In chapters 1 and 2 he shows his love toward them, how all that he said, did, and suffered was for their profit and benefit, and how they ought to trust him for the best.

After that he praises the office of the gospel, which is the highest and most comforting of all works and is for the profit and benefit of men’s consciences. He shows how it is nobler than the office of the law, also how it is persecuted, and yet increases among believers and produces through the cross a hope of eternal glory. But with all this he touches the false apostles, who were inciting the law over against the gospel, teaching mere outward holiness—that
is, hypocrisy—and allowing the inner shame of unbelief to continue. This he does in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

In chapters 6 and 7 he exhorts them to implement this kind of preaching in the things they do and suffer. He concludes by praising them, so that he may encourage them to carry on.

In chapters 8 and 9 he exhorts them to contribute also material aid and help in time of scarcity to the saints in Jerusalem, who from the outset had given over all their possessions, Acts 4:34-35.

In chapters 10, 11, and 12 he deals with the false apostles.

In chapter 13 he threatens those who had sinned and not reformed.

Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians

1546 (1522)
The Galatians had been brought by St. Paul to the true Christian faith, from the law to the gospel. After his departure, however, false apostles came along. They were disciples of the true apostles, but they so turned the Galatians around that they believed they had to be saved by works of the law and were committing sin if they did not keep the law—as even several dignitaries in Jerusalem maintained, Acts 15.

To refute them, St. Paul magnifies his office; he will not take a back seat to any other apostle. He boasts that his doctrine and office are from God alone, in order that he might silence the boast of the false apostles who helped themselves to the works and reputation of the true apostles. He says it is not true, even if an angel were to preach differently, or he himself, to say nothing of disciples of apostles, or of apostles themselves. This he does in chapters 1 and 2, and concludes that everyone must be justified without merit, without works, without law, through Christ alone.

In chapters 3 and 4 he proves all this with passages of Scripture, examples, and analogies. He shows that the law brings sin and a curse rather than righteousness. Righteousness is promised by God, fulfilled by Christ without the law, given to us—out of grace alone.

In chapters 5 and 6 he teaches the works of love that ought to follow faith.

83 This sentence did not occur in editions prior to 1530.

Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians

1546 (1522)
In this epistle St. Paul teaches, first, what the gospel is, how it was predestined by God alone in eternity, and earned and sent forth through Christ, so that all who believe on it become righteous, godly, living, saved men, and free from the law, sin, and death. This he does in the first three chapters.

Then he teaches that false teachings and the commandments of men are to be avoided, so that we may remain true to one Head, and become sure and genuine and complete in Christ alone. For in him we have everything, so that we need nothing beside him. This he does in chapter 4.

Then he goes on to teach that we are to practice and prove our faith with good works, avoid sin, and fight with spiritual weapons against the devil, so that through the cross we may be steadfast in hope.

Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians

1546 (1522)
In this epistle St. Paul praises and admonishes the Philippians that they abide and carry on in the true faith and increase in love. But since injury is always done to faith by false apostles and teachers of works, he warns them against these men and points out to them many different preachers—some good, some bad—including even himself and his disciples, Timothy and Epaphroditus. This he does in chapters 1 and 2.

In chapter 3 he rejects that human righteousness not based on faith, which is taught and held by the false apostles. He offers himself as an example: he had lived gloriously in this kind of righteousness, and yet now holds it to be nothing, for the sake of the righteousness of Christ. For human righteousness makes the belly its god, and makes men enemies of the cross of Christ.

In chapter 4 he exhorts them to peace and good outward conduct toward each other, and thanks them for the gift they sent him.
Preace to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians
1546 (1522)

Just as the Epistle to the Galatians resembles and is modeled on the Epistle to the Romans, comprising in outline the same material that is more fully and richly developed in Romans; so this epistle resembles that to the Ephesians and comprises also in outline the same contents.

First he praises and wishes for the Colossians, that they continue and increase in faith. He delineates what the gospel and faith are, namely, a wisdom which recognizes Christ as Lord and God, crucified for us, which has been hidden for ages but now brought into the open through his ministry. This is the first chapter.

In chapter 2 he warns them against the doctrines of men, which are always contrary to faith. He depicts these doctrines more clearly than they are depicted anywhere else in Scripture, and criticizes them in a masterly way.

In chapter 3 he exhorts them to be fruitful in the pure faith, doing all sorts of good works for one another, and he describes for some various stations in life the works which are appropriate to them.

In chapter 4 he commends himself to their prayers and gives them greetings and encouragement.

Preace to the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians
1546 (1522)

This epistle St. Paul writes out of especial love and apostolic solicitude. For in the first two chapters he praises them because they received the gospel from him with such earnestness that they remained steadfast in it despite suffering and persecution, and became a beautiful example of faith to all congregations everywhere, and suffered persecution from their own kinsfolk like Christ and his apostles did from the Jews—as St. Paul by way of example had himself also suffered and led a holy life when he was with them. For this he thanks God, that his gospel had borne such fruit among them.

In chapter 3 he shows his care and solicitude that this labor of his and their praiseworthy beginning not be brought to nothing by the devil and his apostles through the doctrines of men. For this reason he sent Timothy to them beforehand to make sure about this. And he thanks God that things were still right among them and hopes that they continue to increase.

In chapter 4 he exhorts them to guard against sin and to do good to one another. He also answers a question which they had presented to him through Timothy concerning the resurrection of the dead, whether all would rise at once, or whether some after others.

In chapter 5 he writes of the Last Day, how it shall come suddenly and quickly. He gives them some good directions for governing other people and tells them what attitude they are to take toward the lives and teachings of others.

Preace to the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians
1546 (1522)

In the first epistle [5:2], Paul had resolved for the Thessalonians the question of the Last Day, telling them that it would come quickly, as a thief in the night. Now as is likely to happen—that one question always gives rise to another, because of misunderstanding—the Thessalonians understood that the Last Day was already at hand. Thereupon Paul writes this epistle and explains himself.

In chapter 1 he comforts them with the eternal reward of their faith and of their patience amid sufferings of every kind and with the punishment of their persecutors in eternal pain.

In chapter 2 he teaches that before the Last Day, the Roman Empire must first pass away, and Antichrist set himself up as God in Christendom and seduce the unbelieving world with false doctrines and signs—until Christ shall come and destroy him by his glorious coming, first slaying him with spiritual preaching.

In chapter 3 he gives some admonitions, especially that they
rebuke the idlers who are not supporting themselves by their own labor. If the idlers will not reform, then the faithful shall avoid them. And this is a stiff rebuke to the clergy of our day.

Preface to the First Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy
1546 (1522)

This epistle St. Paul writes in order to provide a model to all bishops of what they are to teach and how they are to rule Christendom in the various stations of life, so that it may not be necessary for them to rule Christians according to their own human opinions.

In chapter 1 he charges that a bishop keep true faith and love and resist the false preachers of the law who, beside Christ and the gospel, would also insist on the works of the law. In a brief summary, he comprehends the entire Christian doctrine concerning the purpose of the law and the nature of the gospel. He offers himself as an example to comfort all sinners and those with troubled conscience."

In chapter 2 he charges that prayer be made for all stations of life. He also commands that women are not to preach or wear costly adornment, but are to be obedient to men.

In chapter 3 he describes the kind of persons that bishops, or priests, and their wives ought to be, and also the deacons and their wives. He praises those who desire to be bishops of this kind.

In chapter 4 he prophesies of false bishops and the spiritual estate which is opposed to that spoken of above, who will not be persons of that kind, but instead will forbid marriage and foods, and with their doctrines of men inculcate the very opposite of the things Paul has described.

In chapter 5 he gives orders as to how widows and young women should be looked after, and which widows are to be supported from the common funds; also how godly bishops or priests are to be held in honor, and blameworthy ones punished.

In chapter 6 he exhorts the bishops to hold fast to the pure gospel and to promulgate it by their preaching and living. They are to avoid senseless and meddlesome controversies which are only raised for gaining worldly reputation and riches.

Preface to the Second Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy
1546 (1522)

This epistle is a farewell letter, in which St. Paul exhorts Timothy to go on propagating the gospel, even as he has begun. This is quite necessary, since there are many who fall away; and false spirits and teachers keep springing up all around. Therefore it is incumbent upon a bishop always to be alert and to work at the gospel.

But he prophesies especially, in chapters 3 and 4, concerning the perilous time at the end of the world. It is then that a false spiritual life will lead all the world astray, with an outward show, under which every sort of wickedness and wrong will have its fling. Sad to sayl we now see this prophecy of St. Paul all too amply fulfilled in our clergy.

Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to Titus
1546 (1522)

This is a short epistle, but a model of Christian doctrine, in which is comprehended in a masterful way all that is necessary for a Christian to know and to live.

In chapter 1 he teaches what kind of man a bishop, or pastor, ought to be, namely, one who is pious and learned in preaching the gospel and in refuting the false teachers of works and of man-made laws, those who are always warring against faith and leading consciences away from Christian liberty into the captivity of their own man-made works, [as if these works,] which are actually worthless, [should make them righteous before God.]"

In chapter 2 he teaches the various estates—the older, the younger, wives, husbands, masters, and slaves—how they are to act, as those whom Christ, by his death, has won for his own.

In chapter 3 he teaches Christians to honor worldly rulers and to obey them. He cites again the grace that Christ has won for us,
so that no one may think that obeying rulers is enough, since all our righteousness is nothing before God. And he forbids association with the obstinate and with heretics.

Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon

1546 (1522)

This epistle gives us a masterful and tender illustration of Christian love. For here we see how St. Paul takes the part of poor Onesimus and, to the best of his ability, advocates his cause with his master. He acts exactly as if he were himself Onesimus, who had done wrong.

Yet he does this not with force or compulsion, as lay within his rights; but he empties himself of his rights in order to compel Philemon also to waive his rights. What Christ has done for us with God the Father, that St. Paul does also for Onesimus with Philemon. For Christ emptied himself of his rights [Phil. 2:7] and overcame the Father with love and humility, so that the Father had to put away his wrath and rights, and receive us into favor for the sake of Christ, who so earnestly advocates our cause and so heartily takes our part. For we are all his Onesimus's if we believe.

Preface to the First Epistle of St. Peter

1546 (1522)

This epistle St. Peter wrote to the converted heathen; he exhorts them to be steadfast in faith and to increase through all kinds of suffering and good works.

In chapter 1 he strengthens their faith through the divine promise and power of the salvation to come. He shows that this salvation has not been merited by us but was first proclaimed by the prophets. Therefore they ought now to live new and holy lives, and forget the old life, as those who have been born anew through the living and eternal Word of God.

In chapter 2 he teaches them to know Christ as the Head and

WORD AND SACRAMENT

87 The name Onesimus in Greek means profitable, helpful, or useful.
deny Christ. He threatens these men severely with three terrible illustrations and depicts them so clearly with their avarice, pride, wickedness, fornication, and hypocrisy that one must plainly see he means the clergy of today. For these have swallowed the whole world in their greed and are wickedly leading an irresponsible, fleshly, worldly life.

In chapter 3 he shows that the Last Day will come soon; and though in the sight of [fur] men it may seem a thousand years, yet in the sight of [fur] God it is as one day.\(^9\) He describes what will happen at the Last Day, how everything shall be consumed by fire. [However, he also prophesies that at that time people will be scornful and, like the Epicureans,\(^{40}\) will think nothing of faith.

In summary, chapter 1 shows what Christendom was to be like at the time of the pure gospel. Chapter 2 shows how it was to be in the time of the pope and the doctrines of men. Chapter 3 shows how, after this, people will despise both the gospel and all doctrine, and will believe nothing—and this is now in full swing—until Christ comes.\(^{41}\)

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\(^9\) Editions prior to 1530 here added these unclear sentences, which Luther deleted from 1530 on: "Now all that die are in the sight of [fur] God, but what lives is in the sight of [fur] men. Hence, to each the Last Day comes quickly after his death." (WA, DB 7, 314, n. 19). Their meaning may perhaps be derived from his exposition of I Peter [3:8] in 1523-1524, where he says with respect to the reckoning of time alluded to in Ps. 90:4: "There are two ways of looking at it: one, in the sight of [fur] God; the other, in the sight of [fur] the world. . . . In the sight of God [fur Gottes angesicht] there is no reckoning of time. . . . A man dies; his body is buried and decays, lies in the earth and knows nothing. When the original man [der erst mensch] arises on the Last Day, however, he will think he has scarcely lain there an hour." WA 14, 70-71.

\(^40\) Tradition had long referred to the hedonistic ethics reflected in Luke 12:19 as Epicurean. While the Athenian philosopher Epicurus (342-270 B.C.) regarded pleasure as the absolute good, he did not thereby mean merely immediate bodily pleasures (sensual gratification) but also those derived from the intellectual and moral faculties. The Epicureans, of course, did not believe in any life to come (cf. Acts 17:18-32) since at death the disembodied soul dissolved into the primordial "indivisible" atoms from which it had been compounded in space. Cf. p. 267, n. 82.

\(^{41}\) The concluding sentences, here set in brackets, did not occur in editions prior to 1530.
Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews

1546 (1522)

Up to this point we have had [to do with] the true and certain chief books of the New Testament. The four which follow have from ancient times had a different reputation. In the first place, the fact that Hebrews is not an epistle of St. Paul, or of any other apostle, is proved by what it says in chapter 2[:3], that through those who had themselves heard it from the Lord this doctrine has come to us and remained among us. It is thereby made clear that he is speaking about the apostles, as a disciple to whom this doctrine has come from the apostles, perhaps long after them. For St. Paul, in Galatians 1[:1], testifies powerfully that he has his gospel from no man, neither through men, but from God himself.

Again, there is a hard knot in the fact that in chapters 6[:4-6] and 10[:20-27] it flatly denies and forbids to sinners any repentance after baptism; and in chapter 12[:17] it says that Esau sought repentance and did not find it. This [seems, as it stands, to be] contrary to all the gospels and to St. Paul's epistles; and although

44 In terms of order, Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation come last in Luther's New Testament because of his negative estimate of their apostolicity. In a catalogue of "The Books of the New Testament" which followed immediately upon his Preface to the New Testament (see pp. 357-362) Luther regularly listed these four-without numbers—at the bottom of a list in which he named the other twenty-three books, in the order in which they still appear in English Bibles, and numbered them consecutively from 1-23 (WA, DB 6, 12-13), a procedure identical to that with which he also listed the books of the Apocrypha (see p. 337, n. 1). There was in practice considerable lack of unanimity on the extent of the New Testament canon even in the late Middle Ages. Erasmus' critical attitude toward these four books, known to Luther from his Annotationes to his 1516 Greek New Testament, was openly accepted by the Catholic Cajetan. Reu, Luther's German Bible, pp. 175-176.

45 Contrary to Erasmus' ascription of authorship to Paul (following Jerome), Luther has in mind the statement from Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History, II, iii, 5: "Some dispute the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it was rejected by the church of Rome as not being by Paul." Kirsopp Lake (trans.), Eusebius: the church of Rome as not being by Paul. WA, DB 7, 555 and 631, n. 344, 2.

45 Beginning in 1530 the straightforward "is" of the earlier editions was replaced in the later editions by the milder words here given in brackets, probably in keeping with Luther's generally favorable judgment of the book as expressed in the next paragraph. WA, DB 7, 632, n. 344, 15/16.

46 In the earliest general history of the church, Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History (II, xii, 25), the author (cited ca. 339) writes, "Such is the story of James, whose is said to be the first of the Epistles called Catholic. It is to be

Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude

1546 (1522)

Though this epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and consider it a good book, because it sets up no doctrines of men but vigorously promulgates the law of God. However, to state my own opinion about it, though without prejudice to anyone,
I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle, and my reasons follow.

In the first place it is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works [2:24]. It says that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered his son Isaac [2:21]; though in Romans 4[2:22] St. Paul teaches to the contrary that Abraham was justified apart from works, by his faith alone, before he had offered his son, and proves it by Moses in Genesis 15[6]. Now although this epistle might be helped and an interpretation devised for this justification by works, it cannot be defended in its application to works [Jas. 2:23] of Moses' statement in Genesis 15[6]. For Moses is speaking here only of Abraham's faith, and not of his works, as St. Paul demonstrates in Romans 4. This fault, therefore, proves that this epistle is not the work of any apostle.

In the second place its purpose is to teach Christians, but in all this long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ. He names Christ several times; however he teaches nothing about him, but only speaks of general faith in God. Now it is the office of a true apostle to preach of the Passion and resurrection and office of Christ, and to lay the foundation for faith in him, as Christ himself says in John 15[27], "You shall bear witness to me." All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate [treiben] Christ. And that is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ. For all the Scriptures show us Christ, Romans 321, and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ, I Corinthians 2[2]. Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.

But this James does nothing more than drive to the law and to its works. Besides, he throws things together so chaotically that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took a few sayings from the disciples of the apostles and thus tossed them off on paper. Or it may perhaps have been written by someone on the basis of his preaching. He calls the law a "law of liberty" [1:25], though Paul calls it a law of slavery, of wrath, of death, and of sin.

Moreover he cites the sayings of St. Peter [in 5:20]: "Love covers a multitude of sins" [1 Pet. 4:8], and again [in 4:10], "Humble yourselves under the hand of God" [1 Pet. 5:6]; also the saying of St. Paul in Galatians 5[17], "The Spirit lusteth against envy." And yet, in point of time, St. James was put to death by Herod [Acts 12:2] in Jerusalem, before St. Peter. So it seems that this author came long after St. Peter and St. Paul.

In a word, he wanted to guard against those who relied on faith without works, but was unequal to the task. He tries to accomplish by harping on the law what the apostles accomplish by stimulating people to love. Therefore I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him.

Concerning the epistle of St. Jude, no one can deny that it is an extract or copy of St. Peter's second epistle, so very like it are all the words. He also speaks of the apostles like a disciple who comes long after them, and so is not his master. Hence he is not to be called apostolic, as he himself says [Jude 13], "I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle; and my reasons follow." He also speaks of the apostles like a disciple who comes long after them, and so is not his master. Hence he is not to be called apostolic, as he himself says [Jude 13], "I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle; and my reasons follow."
WORD AND SACRAMENT

after them [Jude 17] and cites sayings and incidents that are found nowhere else in the Scriptures [Jude 9, 14]. This moved the ancient fathers to exclude this epistle from the main body of the Scriptures. Moreover the Apostle Jude did not go to Greek-speaking lands, but to Persia, as it is said, so that he did not write Greek. Therefore, although I value this book, it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books which are supposed to lay the foundations of faith.

Preface to the Revelation of St. John [I]

1522

About this book of the Revelation of John, I leave everyone free to hold his own opinions. I would not have anyone bound to my opinion or judgment. I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic.

First and foremost, the apostles do not deal with visions, but prophecy in clear and plain words, as do Peter and Paul, and Christ in the gospel. For it befits the apostolic office to speak clearly of Christ and his deeds, without images and visions. Moreover there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New, who deals so exclusively with visions and images. For myself, I think it approximates the Fourth Book of Esdras; I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it.

Moreover he seems to me to be going much too far when he commends his own book so highly [Revelation 22]—indeed, more than any of the other sacred books do, though they are much more important—and threatens that if anyone takes away anything from it, God will take away from him, etc. Again, they are supposed to be blessed who keep what is written in this book; and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it. This is just the same as if we did not have the book at all. And there are many far better books available for us to keep.

Many of the fathers also rejected this book a long time ago, although St. Jerome, to be sure, refers to it in exalted terms and says that it is above all praise and that there are as many mysteries in it as words. Still, Jerome cannot prove this at all, and his praise at numerous places is too generous.

Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit leads him. My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. For me this is reason enough not to think highly of it: Christ is neither taught nor known in it. But to teach Christ, this is the thing which an apostle is bound above all else to do; as Christ says in Acts 1:8, “You shall be my witnesses.” Therefore I stick to the books which present Christ to me clearly and purely.

Preface to the Revelation of St. John [II] 1546 (1530)

There are many different kinds of prophecy in Christendom. One is prophecy which interprets the writings of the prophets. Paul speaks of this in I Corinthians 12 and 14, and in other places as well. This is the most necessary kind and we must have it every day, because it teaches the Word of God, lays the foundation of Christen-

60 The canonicity of Revelation was disputed by Marcion, Caius of Rome, Dio of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, and the Synod of Laodicea in A.D. 360, though it was accepted by others as Eusebius reports. Cf. p. 400, n. 63.
62 In his considerably revised and significantly new edition of the New Testament in 1530, Luther supplanted his earlier brief Preface to Revelation with a much more extensive one, which by his own admission was strong in its antipapistic orientation (cf. his February 25, 1530, letter to Nicholas Hausmann in Currie, The Letters of Martin Luther, p. 204; WA, Br 5, 242). This was the year
WORD AND SACRAMENT

dom, and defends the faith. In a word, it rules, preserves, establishes, and performs the preaching ministry.

Another kind foretells things to come which are not previously contained in Scripture, and this prophecy is of three types. The first expresses itself simply in words, without images and figures—as Moses, David, and others of the prophets prophesy about Christ, and as Christ and the apostles prophesy about Antichrist, false teachers, etc. The second type does this with images, but alongside them it supplies their interpretation in specific words—as Joseph interprets dreams, and Daniel both dreams and images. The third type does it without either words or interpretations, exclusively with images and figures, like this book of Revelation and like the dreams, visions, and images that many holy people have had from the Holy Spirit—as Peter in Acts 2[:17] preaches from Joel [2:28], “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” So long as this kind of prophecy remains without explanation and gets no sure interpretation, it is a concealed and mute prophecy and has not yet come to the profit and fruit which it is to give to Christendom.

This is the way it has been with this book heretofore. Many have tried their hands at it, but until this very day they have attained no certainty. Some have even brewed it into many stupid things out of their own heads. Because its interpretation is uncertain and its meaning hidden, we have also let it alone until now, especially because some of the ancient fathers held that it was not the work of St. John, the Apostle—as is stated in The Ecclesiastical History, Book III, chapter 25. For our part, we still share this doubt. By that, however, no one should be prevented from regarding this as the work of St. John the Apostle, or of whichever else he chooses. Since we would nonetheless like to be sure of its meaning or interpretation, we will give other and higher minds something to think about by stating our own views.

In which Luther explicitly noted in the Protestant confession presented at Augsburg, the absence of his dogma on the pope as Antichrist (WA, DB 7, 482). The new preface was retained in all subsequent editions of the New Testament and of the complete Bible and is here given as it appeared in the complete Bible of 1546, as translated from the text in WA, DB 7, 407-421.